

FIRST DRIVE

2009 MERCEDES-BENZ B-CLASS



For the 2009 model-year, the B-Class received a mid-generation makeover. This Mercedes-Benz is offered as a four-door hatchback, in B200 and B200 Turbo trim levels. The B-Class was introduced in 2005 as a 2006 model, in Canada only for North America. Mercedes identifies the Audi A3, Mini Clubman and Volvo V50 as the main B-Class competitors.

On the outside, updates were made mainly to the grille, bumpers and rear tail lights. The roof-mounted antenna was shortened, to facilitate the trip through the car-wash, and the rear window was enlarged.

Refreshments to the cabin include a revised seat cushion design and new fabrics. Standard equipment has been enhanced with a new audio system and Bluetooth mobile phone interface. As an option, music fans can obtain an interface that allows connection and control of portable devices such as iPods, USB storage media and MP3 players.

Size-wise, the Class-B is a bit shorter than the Mazda5. A hallmark feature of this small M-B is a sandwich floor design that positions the engine and transmission on an angle and partially under the passenger cell. The layout allocates nearly 70% of total vehicle length to the passenger cell. In a serious frontal impact, this particular design allows the engine block to slide down along the floor incline where the pedals are lodged, and under rather than back into the passenger cell. The sandwich concept also offers an important advantage in a side impact, with passengers seated about 200 mm higher and above the impact zone. These elements are an illustration of the Mercedes-Benz commitment to vehicle safety.

To power the front wheels of the B-Class, the only front-drive Mercedes available to Canadian drivers, buyers get to choose between normally aspirated or turbocharged versions of the 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine. The former develops 134 hp and 136 lb-ft of torque; the latter produces 193 hp and 206 lb-ft of torque. Both versions can be hooked either to a five-speed manual or to a CVT continuously variable transmission.

On the roads of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island we found that all versions of the B-Class were very pleasant to drive and imperturbable in all conditions. However, it should be noted that with the Sport Package's firmed-up suspension, road bumps are clearly and stiffly felt. Since the base suspension provides very competent handling, it is an excellent choice for a well-balanced ride. The turbo engine, needless to say, provides more energetic performance, but the base engine does a good, honest job. Unfortunately, no diesel engine is slated for this Mercedes.

Pricing for the B200 starts at \$29,900, and \$34,400 for the B200 Turbo.

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